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**LARRY CRAIG**

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**NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Victory At Last!** **by Senator Larry Craig**

It's been a long fight, but I'm happy to declare a victory for agriculture, particularly one that has vital implications for the health of our farms, ranches and rural communities, and the food security of our country.

After nearly two years of work leading to the reauthorization of our farm and food programs, Congress has sent to the President a 673-page document containing the future of food and agricultural policy, now known as the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008.

This comprehensive piece of legislation, commonly referred to as the Farm Bill, is one of the most complicated pieces of legislation taken up in the U.S. Congress, and it is arguably one of the most important.

Unlike many bills considered by Congress, this is one that will touch each and every citizen of our nation. Whether you are a potato grower in Rupert, a resident of a rural community such as my hometown of Midvale, or a parent to an elementary school child in Coeur d'Alene, this piece of legislation affects you.

In an age of skyrocketing energy prices, economic uncertainty, and now what some have deemed a global food crisis, we should at least be certain about one thing: our nation's agricultural and food security. We cannot take for granted our ability to feed ourselves. If we do, we may find ourselves in the same situation as we do with oil today – dependent on other nations.

This bill will do a number of things to ensure our food security. First and foremost, it will keep our food producers productive and profitable, and it will ensure access to those foods for underprivileged Americans. This includes things like a safety net to protect Idaho's farmers from volatile price swings and nutrition programs that give access to free fresh fruits and vegetables to millions of low-income children in schools around the country and in our State of Idaho.

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This bill also encourages the best possible stewardship of our agricultural lands through a number of conservation programs. These programs will ensure that our agricultural lands remain a resource for future generations. They will help our dairies better deal with new environmental challenges as their industry continues to evolve. And they will help American agriculture continue to diversify to meet evolving demands for innovative renewable energy solutions – including methane digesters for our dairies and cellulosic ethanol technology – beyond our current burgeoning corn-ethanol industry.

I have worked over the last couple of years, along with my colleagues on the Senate Agriculture Committee, to ensure that Idaho's priorities are included in this bill – ranging from maintaining vital commodity programs to inserting a new set of programs for a long-neglected sector of U.S. agriculture: the specialty crop industry. Some may not know this, but the Idaho potato itself is a specialty crop and has not been included in previous farm bills. In fact, approximately 45 percent of Idaho's crop cash receipts are from specialty crops, including potatoes, nursery crops, onions, mint, apples, hops, peaches, cherries – crops that will also now have a place in federal farm policy.

Though I know this is not a perfect bill in many ways, it is overall a great bill for the State of Idaho – for our farmers and ranchers and for the future of our food and agricultural security. I am pleased that both the House and the Senate have passed the final Farm Bill Conference Report by overwhelming majorities and sent it to the desk of the President, to show that we can be an effective Congress when we put our mind to it, for the good of agriculture and for the good of the nation.